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SUBJECT: TURKEY-IRAQ: SPRING WEATHER BRINGS UPSWING IN
ANTI-PKK OPERATIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF BORDER

REF: ANKARA 0778

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

11. (S) Summary: Turkish security operations against PKK terrorists in Turkey and in northern Iraq have increased with the onset of spring. Meanwhile, clashes within Turkey have occurred as far north as Kars and have claimed up to eleven Turkish dead this month. Turkish forces conducted the largest cross-border military attacks this year with multiple air strikes and artillery fire on April 25 and 26 against up to 260 targets in northern Iraq. Although Turkish forces do not appear poised for a ground incursion into northern Iraq, DCHOD Gen Ergin Saygun told us April 22 that short-notice hot pursuit operations against targets of opportunity remain likely. Turkey continues to pre-notify us of their cross-border operations in sufficient time to de-conflict battle space. End summary

Cross-Border Activity

12. (S) For the first three weeks of April, Turkish cross-border operations against terrorist targets in northern Iraq, including five artillery attacks and four air strikes, were relatively small, close to the border, and not trumpeted in the media. Tactical targets included PKK encampments in the border region, which were struck to prevent or disrupt infiltration and planned attacks in Turkey. The Turks have paid less attention to deeper targets, such as PKK headquarters facilities in Qandil, since the weather turned. Back-to-back cross-border air strikes late on April 25 and early on April 26, however, were the largest this year, involving up to 43 aircraft against as many as 260 targets in the Zap-Metina, Avi Shin, Hakurk, and Gara regions of northern Iraq. In between the two runs, there was sustained artillery fire at the same areas. The Ankara Coordination Directorate (ACD -- in our Office of Defense Cooperation), was notified of all these actions in sufficient time to permit de-confliction of air and ground battle space. Turkish officials have promised to provide us information on precise targets struck and damage assessment.

13. (C) In contrast to limited public reporting on earlier strikes, the TGS announced on April 29 that 43 sorties had struck 73 PKK shelters, 14 caves, 8 air defense locations, 7 communications nodes, and 9 storage depots during the April 25-26 operations, killing a number of PKK terrorists. The

TGS report was accompanied by video footage of the air strikes.

¶4. (S) Spring conditions along the mountainous border region have allowed for more PKK movement and have thus made more targets available. Snow is no longer a factor. PKK terrorists are using spring foliage in the region, although sparse, to camouflage their movements. Increasing accuracy of artillery and air attacks has forced the PKK to change its tactics; terrorists now move in smaller groups of 2-5, communicate less frequently, and in general observe greater operational security measures than in the past. Among high value targets are local PKK leaders, when they can be identified, including a Turkish Army deserter who now reportedly fights with the terrorists.

Increasing Ops Tempo in Southeast

¶5. (U) Meanwhile, violence within Turkey is increasing as the military continues its robust counterinsurgency tempo and PKK militants become more mobile due to better weather. The Turkish General Staff (TGS) in March extended travel restrictions in six designated security zones in Sirnak, Hakkari, and Siirt Provinces that were originally established last summer. While Turkish forces continue to actively patrol along the Iraqi border near PKK infiltration routes used in the past, the military has launched offensive anti-PKK campaigns much further north in Bingol and Kars provinces.

¶6. (C) PKK terrorists may be gearing up for their usual spring offensive. The TGS has reported several incidents this

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month outside the PKK's recent area of operations. Clashes spanned from Kars province on the border with Armenia to Giresun and Tokat provinces along the Black Sea and to Hatay along the Syrian border. Turkish security forces also claim to have interdicted several PKK plots against civilian targets, including a planned attack against a police station in Diyarbakir and an attempted bombing of a gas station in Adana on March 1, according to the Turkish National Police. TGS reported apprehending two PKK members in Istanbul province in March. The PKK -- grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology -- is also reportedly encouraging members to commemorate May 1 with uprisings across Turkey.

¶7. (C) According to official TGS figures, eleven Turkish security personnel were killed this month and another 21 wounded, with most of the casualties occurring during the last two weeks. The TGS reports over 30 security force deaths so far this year. There were 97 officially reported encounters with the PKK from the beginning of April through 25 April, compared to 73 in March and only 40 in February. A clash this month in Sirnak killed one Turkish security force member and wounded seven others, while a PKK landmine in Semdinli killed three Turkish soldiers and wounded another. Three civilians were injured April 17 by a mine in Hakkari province, bringing civilian casualties for the year to date up to 11 killed and 52 wounded.

Assessment

¶8. (S) At this time, Turkish ground forces do not appear poised for a major land incursion into northern Iraq. However, DCHOD Gen Ergin Saygun told us April 22 that short-notice hot pursuit operations into northern Iraq against targets of opportunity are likely in the coming weeks. Spring weather and full foliage conditions permit increased PKK mobility and Turkish forces will likely continue to try to interdict and disrupt groups of PKK terrorists seeking to enter Turkey from Iraq.

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